

Amendments to the Specification:

Please replace paragraph [0057] of the original application with the following amended paragraph:

[0057] In this example, if the customer 120 clicks the return link 225 corresponding to order number 815499 the merchant server 110 links to a web page such as that shown in FIG. 4B. This web page lists the goods that comprise order 815499 and includes a stockkeeping unit (SKU) number 250, a good description 255, the quantity 260 of a particular good purchased in the order and a price 265 paid for the good. There are two goods listed in ~~FIG. 3B~~ FIG. 4B; a 56K V90 KFLEX Dual Mode PCI D/F/V Modem Motorola Chip ("Motorola chip") and a 50X Reader EIDE 650A 128k 85 ms 6000 kb/sec Vert Mnt Capb ("50.times.reader"). In this example, a return merchandise authorization (RMA) #319910 has already been issued for the Motorola chip. This may be because the customer 120 previously submitted a return request for the Motorola chip or that the merchant has a policy to automatically grant return requests associated with the chip. As to the 50xreader, the customer 120 is given the option of checking a check box 270 to request a return of that item.

Please replace paragraph [0063] of the original application with the following amended paragraph:

[0063] Returning to the embodiment of FIG. 3, in Step 210 the online return application 150 receives the return service request 305 created by the merchant return application 115 and transmitted by the merchant server 110. In a preferred embodiment, the online return application ~~115~~ 150 resides on the carrier server 140. But it will be readily apparent to one of ordinary skill in the art that the online return application 115 may reside on a separate server or on a stand-alone device. Upon receipt, the online return application 150 verifies that the validity of the data stored in the return service request 305 and assigns a package tracking number 375 (as shown in FIG. 6 and FIG. 8B) to the return transaction. In a preferred embodiment, when a package tracking number 375 is assigned, the shipping information related to the return transaction is

stored in a package tracking database 380. Later, when the package is shipped, the parties to the transaction can track the progress of the package through the carrier system using the package tracking number 375. In a preferred embodiment, the online return application 150 does not itself assign a package tracking number 375, but communicates with another carrier application that assigns package tracking numbers 375 and tracks packages shipped within the carrier system.

Please replace paragraph [0073] of the original application with the following amended paragraph:

[0073] In Step 705, the merchant return application 115 processes the return request and generates a return service request 305, which is transmitted to the label generation application 150 160. In a preferred embodiment, the return service request 305 is formatted as an XML document but other formats are known in the art and may be used with the present invention. Upon receipt of the return service request 305, the online return application 150 verifies the validity of the transmitted data and assigns a package tracking number 375 to the return request. In an alternative embodiment, the online return application 150 does not itself assign a package tracking number 375 to the return transaction, but communicates with another carrier application that assigns package tracking numbers and tracks packages shipped within the carrier system.

Please replace paragraph [0077] of the original application with the following amended paragraph:

[0077] In Step 725, the online return application 150 sends an electronic return notification 550 to the vendor server 130 indicating that a return service request 305 has been processed and that a customer 120 intends to ship a returned good to the vendor. In a preferred embodiment, the electronic return notification 550 has a machine-readable area 560 appended to the human-readable area 560 555 to allow automatic input into a vendor shipping system without the need for human intervention. In alternative embodiments, the returned good is shipped directly to the merchant and no electronic return notification 550 is generated as no vendor is involved.

Alternatively, only the machine-readable area 560 of the electronic return notification 550 is supplied to the vendor.

Please replace paragraphs [0099] of the original application with the following amended paragraph:

[0099] In Step 910, the bounce email address (e.g., merchant email address) will be validated and verified before generating an electronic return notification 550. In Step 920, the online return application 150 generates and sends an electronic return notification 550. In a preferred embodiment, the electronic return notification 550 includes an encrypted XML document attached to the email that includes the bounce email address 370. In a preferred embodiment, the XML document is encrypted using triple data encryption standard (DES) techniques, but other encryption techniques are well known in the art and can be used with the present invention.

Please replace paragraphs [0100] of the original application with the following amended paragraph:

[0100] In Step 930, the online return application 150 determines whether the the electronic return notification 550 is delivered to the customer successfully. If the electronic return notification 550 is delivered, the process ends at Step 950. If the electronic return notification 550 is returned as undeliverable (Step 920 940), the online return application 150 retrieves the XML attachment from the undelivered email and forwards the electronic return notification 550 to the bounce email address 370. The online return application 150 forwards the undelivered email to the merchant server 110 under the assumption that the merchant or other entity associated with the bounce email address 370 is equipped to address the issue that caused the electronic return notification 550 not to be delivered. One of ordinary skill in the art will readily recognize that the undelivered email may also be forwarded to a customer 120, a merchant return application 115 or to any other person or entity that has a valid email address.